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Secretary Bowles Accepts Nomination of Three Mile River Watershed as new Area of Critical Environmental Concern

Public meetings scheduled on proposed designation to enhance protection of
14,200-acre area in Southeastern Massachusetts

BOSTON – Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Ian A. Bowles today announced he has accepted for full public review the nomination of the Three Mile River watershed and headwaters of the Segreganset River in southeastern Massachusetts as a new Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

Covering approximately 14,200 acres in Dighton, Norton, and Taunton, the proposed Three Mile River Watershed ACEC includes tributaries to the Taunton River and is located within the Taunton River Basin. Over 8,000 acres in Norton and Taunton encompass parts of two other ACECs - Canoe River Aquifer and Hockomock Swamp.

Established in 1975 and administered by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the ACEC Program currently includes 28 highly-significant ecological areas covering about 241,000 acres in 73 cities and towns from the Berkshires to the North Shore and Cape Cod. The purpose of the special state designation is to preserve, restore and enhance an area's natural and cultural resources. Proposed projects within an ACEC are subject to stricter environmental reviews to ensure that any adverse impacts to resources are avoided or minimized.

Over the past five years, 11 citizen "nominators," including Taunton Mayor Charles Crowley and a representative of the Southeast Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD), have been preparing the Three Mile River ACEC nomination through various means, including a public outreach campaign. The 40-page nomination submitted to EEA is now subject to public review.

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“I encourage town boards and commissions, environmental organizations, and interested citizens to actively participate in the public review process,” Secretary Bowles said. “It is important that the residents of these communities are informed about the natural and cultural resources of the nominated area, as well as about the nomination process and the ACEC Program itself.”

DCR’s ACEC Program has scheduled three public information meetings on the nomination. Each meeting begins at 7 p.m.:

- Monday, 4/28, at Benjamin Friedman Middle School, 500 Norton Avenue, Taunton;
- Tuesday, 4/29, at Norton Public Library, 68 East Main St., Norton; and
- Thursday, 5/1, at Dighton Grange Hall, 1111 Somerset Ave., Dighton.

These meetings will inform the public about the resources and proposed boundary of the nominated area, and the goals, purpose and effects of ACEC designation. ACEC Program staff will spend the next several months gathering additional information about the environmental resources of the nominated area. As part of this process, EEA will schedule a public hearing this summer or fall, and Secretary Bowles will make a decision on the ACEC designation within 60 days of the hearing.

Copies of the nomination and maps showing the proposed boundary have been distributed to local officials in the three communities, and may be examined at city and town halls, public libraries, and the SRPEDD office in Taunton. A review copy is also available at the offices of the DCR Bureau of Planning and Resource Protection, 251 Causeway Street, 7th Floor, Boston. The nomination and an interactive map may be viewed at <http://www.ibiblio.org/virtualcell/acec/>.

For more information about the ACEC Program, visit <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/acec/index.htm>.

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